Intermontanus

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NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

The House of Representatives is considering a bill which would eliminate much of the pet trade. The **"Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992"** (HR 5013) deals primarily with phasing out imports of wild birds, but it also contains a small section titled "Other Fauna and Flora." This section allows the Secretary of the Interior (or anyone he designates) to make any stricter regulations about any wildlife or plants. In addition, it allows the secretary of the Interior to do whatever he deems necessary to enforce these laws. Basically this bill would put the plant and animal trade at the mercy of the Secretary of the Interior.

If you appose this legislation, write or call your congressmen. You can also ask for a copy of HR 5013 and/or its forerunners HR 2540, HR 2541, and Hr 4958.

For more information about this bill contact the New England Herpetological Society, P.O. Box 1082, Boston, MA 02103. Or call them at (617) 789-5800.

THE LOWLAND LEOPARD FROG, *RANA YAVAPAIENSIS*, IN UTAH

In the last Issue of *Intermontanus* a list of the amphibians and reptiles of Utah was presented, but apparently this list was incomplete. Leon Colborn of the Fish and Wildlife Service noticed the lowland leopard frog (*Rana yavapaiensis*) was not included. This frog occurs in the Virgin River drainage in Washington County and in central Arizona down to Nogales. The frog is a candidate species for federal protection and any information about populations, sightings, etc. would be helpful in determining their status.

The only sighting of these frogs that I know of was reported by Russell Bezette in 1989. Russell saw a couple of leopard frogs in the Virgin River near Littlefield, AZ. Although the frogs were not caught for positive identification, I suspect they were *R. yavapaiensis* since the relict frog (*R. onca*) is thought to be extinct and no other leopard frogs are known to occur in the area.

If you see one of these frogs in Utah contact either UtAH or Leon Colborn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2078 Administration Building, 1745 West 1700 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84104-5110. By the way, even though these frogs are not protected by the state they should not be collected.

INFORMATION REQUESTED

The Fish and Wildlife Service has requested information regarding a few species of reptile and amphibians in Utah. All of the species are currently listed as category 2 species which means they are currently under study to determine if they are threatened or endangered. The Utah species are: the chuckwalla (*Sauromalus obesus*); the boreal toad (*Bufo boreas*); the southwestern toad (*Bufo microscaphus*); the relict frog (*Rana onca*); the spotted frog (*Rana pretiosa*); and the lowland frog (*Rana yavapaiensis*).

If you have any information about these species (including references to studies, unpublished data, localities, etc.) contact either UtAH or Leon Colborn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2078 Administration Building, 1745 West 1700 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84104-5110.

THE WAHSATCH ALLIANCE OF HERPETOCULTURISTS

The Wahsatch Alliance of Herpetoculturists (W.A.H.) recently started publishing *The Amateur Herpetoculturist*, a bi-monthly publication for herp enthusiasts - novice and expert alike. Regular columns deal with specific areas of herpetoculture and each issue has at least three feature articles.

The feature articles in the first two issues have focused on: electrical hazards in cages; captive diet of the green iguana, *Iguana iguana*; cage substrates; and various aspects of specific species (such as Brazilian rainbow boas, ball pythons, and Savannah monitors).

Regular columns include questions and answers, news notes, health suggestions, and a column titled "Around the Rockies" in which they spotlight a herp group. In fact the latest issue spotlighted UtAH.

Subscriptions are $9.50 annually, add $2.50 for Canada and $5.00 for foreign countries. For more information, or to join, write W.A.H., P.O. Box 1907, Casper, WY 82602.

CAPTIVE CARE

ADVANTAGES TO BUYING CAPTIVE-BORN AND RAISED AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES, AND SOME LIMITATIONS

The following is an adaptation of an article published in the June 1992 bulletin of Glades Herp. Inc. of North Ft. Myers, Florida

Captive born and raised amphibians and reptiles cost more than wild-caught specimens, so why should I buy them? There are several advantages to buying captive born (CB) and raised specimens, such as:

1. CB babies are usually healthy, parasite-free, and feeding voluntarily.
2. These babies usually adjust better to captivity, grow faster and reproduce more readily.
3. CB specimens are available in many colors and patterns, often more than occur naturally (this is particularly true of boas, pythons, rat and kingsnakes).
4. This practice does not require removal of animals from the wild. Many specimens rarely seen in nature (such as the gray-banded kingsnake) have become common to the pet trade due to captive breeding.
5. In the future, sustainable harvest collecting of certain wildlife species may provide enough financial incentive to allow residents of third world countries the possibility of saving their own corner of the environment.

Unfortunately, captive breeding does not yet produce everything for everyone. For example:

1. There is a great selection of CB colubrid snakes now available, a fair selection of pythons and boas, but only a smattering of frogs, lizards, turtles, and salamanders. The lizard-breeding revolution is just beginning; in a few more years a much greater selection of these will be available. For now the founding stocks must be provided by imports.
2. New blood may be needed for genetic diversity. Also, some breeders desire founding stock with known locality data to develop a "pure" strain.
3. Some breeders require adult animals and captive born adults are rarely available.
4. Most CB animals are only available

seasonally, not always when needed or desired.

My own experience with captive-born verses wild-caught specimens confirms those made by Glades Herp. above.

Donald F. Smee, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322-5600.

ROSY BOA CARE AND WHERE TO BUY ANIMALS

Question: I have two female desert rosy boas, one almost two years old and one almost one year old. I assume you have at least one, as you had an ad for one in the newsletter. I tried putting them in a terrarium with about four inches of dirt, so they can burrow. But after a few months, the older snake got a mouth problem that led to mouth rot. I put him in a bare cage, and used medication and it eventually healed. However, a couple of months after it was healed, the younger boa (which was still in the cage with dirt) also started showing signs of mouth problems (i.e., lips becoming slightly inflamed), so I removed her immediately. What do you keep yours in? Do you think the dirt is the cause of it? I use sterilized, non-fertilized, soil from Ernst; although I think it is the rubbing and dirt getting in their mouths while burrowing that's the cause of it. I don't like using a bare cage for several reasons. (1) It doesn't look as good. I keep my terrariums very aesthetically pleasing. (2) It's more like their natural habitat. They burrow in nature, and probably feel more secure and at home in the dirt. And (3), they seem to be a lot more active in the cage with dirt and plants. I still keep them in the bare cages, and they seem healthy now. Do you have any Ideas or suggestions on the matter?

The older rosy boa has some scales that look depressed or sunken in – not very noticeably, but still they're not flat and full. Do you know if this is a problem or what's causing it? Any suggestions on the care or behavior of rosy boas?
-B. Hainsworth

Reply: There are several things that may have caused the mouth infections in your rosy boas; most of which can be tied to the dirt in the cage. It may have been that while the snake(s) were eating, some of the dirt stuck to the mouse causing the snake break a tooth or two. These broken teeth then became infected. Or perhaps bacteria growing in the dirt was transfered to the snake's mouth while burrowing or eating. I know you said you used sterilized, non-fertilized soil, but as soon as the dirt becomes wet, bacteria and fungus start growing. Thus sterile soil is not sterile for long. Still, it may have been caused by injuries incurred while burrowing. In any case, it is best not to keep these snakes on dirt; but that leaves your question of how to have an aesthetically pleasing, sterile cage?

Personally I would not recommend keeping live plants in a small terrarium because of the pathogens which may be introduced or cultured in the potting soil. In addition, insects may become a problem with certain plants. Would silk plants be an acceptable option?

Bedding for an aesthetically pleasing cage depends on your individual taste. Many people like pine bedding (not to be confused with pine shavings), corn cob, sand, and indoor/out-door carpet. Pine bedding, corn cob, and sand allows the animal to burrow and often hide boxes are not required. I think you would run into many of the same problems with sand as you did with dirt, although it is easier to clean because you can use a strainer. Both sand and corn cob have been ingested by snakes and cause intestinal blockages. If you choose one of these substrates you should feed the animals in a separate cage. Pine bedding could also be ingested, but this is not as common. Regardless of the substrate it should be replaced regularly which means cost is a factor. Pine bedding is relatively inexpensive and easy to replace. Unlike the other substrates, a snake cannot burrow in indoor/out-door carpet. However, carpet is probably the easiest and cheapest of these substrates. A good carpet should have a rubber backing and a fiber (not plastic) pile. If you cut two pieces for each cage, cleaning becomes as simple as changing carpet pieces. The carpet can even be disinfected by soaking it in a weak (5-10%) clorox solution. A hide box is required when carpet is used as the substrate. Actually, a hide box is a good idea regardless of the substrate, particularly with the rosy boas.

Rosy boas spend a lot of time underground, but I would be surprised if they were actually burrowers. They do not seem to have any adaptations for burrowing. I would guess they normally use existing holes, tunnels, and crevices. Therefore a hide box may be more appropriate than a substrate which forces them to burrow to escape light.

As far as the sunken scales go, I would have to guess it's one of three things. It could just be the scales in a body fold that have become misshaped because the snake stays in the same position a lot. If this is the case the damaged scales will be confined to vertical lines on the side. Another possibility is the snake is slightly dehydrated. Soaking the snake at least once a week and making sure water is always available should take care of the problem. A water bowl should be large enough for the snake to soak voluntarily. Finally, the scales could have a fungal infection. If you think it is a fugal problem let me know and I'll look up the treatment.

Question: Where can you obtain some of the more uncommon snakes (not California kingsnakes, corn snakes, Burmese and ball pythons, and red-tailed boas that can be found in any pet shop). The only place I know of that sells uncommon snakes is Mark's Ark. And most of their snakes are the above mentioned ones. Whenever I read a book on reptiles, they usually say that this-and-that species is bred in captivity regularly and the babies are available from dealers. Is there some network informing of available animals, or is Mark's Ark the main place in Utah?
-B. Hainsworth

Reply: There are several ways to buy snakes and other reptiles and amphibians in Utah. Obviously the easiest way is to go a pet store, but as you've noticed pet stores often have a poor selection. In addition, few pet stores know how to take care of amphibians and reptiles (Mark's Ark is one of the few exceptions in Utah) and pet stores often have to mark animal prices up 100% or more above the wholesale price in order to make up for the losses due to dead or dying animals.

A better way to buy herps is to buy them direct from a breeder or a dealer. A good way to find the breeders and dealers is to look in some of the better known herpetological magazines, such as The Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society (You can see a copy at the U of U library and perhaps BYU library), and The Vivarium (the U of U may get this one also. I will try to remember to bring a copy of these and other herp publications to the barbecue in September).

One drawback to buying an animal from an out of state breeder or dealer is you don't get to hand pick the animal you want. Occasionally you end up with the wrong sex or specimens that are not what you expected. For example, I recently bought five rainbow boas from three

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different sources. The first one I bought from a breeder in California who described the animal as an above average specimen, "a 7+ on a scale of 1 to 10." Naturally I thought a 7+ would be fine for starters and paid a healthy sum. I asked the breeder to call to make sure it would be warm enough to ship the snake because it was the middle of December. About a week later my wife called me at school to tell me the snake would be at the airport in two hours. Great! The week before finals on a day when the temperature didn't get above 30°F and my car heater doesn't work very well. The snake made it okay but it wasn't a 7+, unless he meant a 1 was perfect. Needless to say I will never buy another animal from that breeder. As it turned out I spent more money on that snake than any of the others (which I bought in Utah) and it is the ugliest one I have. Another drawback of buying an animal from a breeder is occasionally the animal is in poor health or has parasites.

Dealers, on the other hand, tend to be more honest and usually guarantee live, healthy, feeding animals. But like pet stores many have outrageous prices. For example, I have seen 9-12' Burmese pythons (typical color phase) on dealer lists for prices ranging from $250 to $600 each.

As to the last part of your question, no Mark's Ark is not the main place to buy amphibians and reptiles in Utah. There is a place in Sandy called Zooherp Inc. that sells amphibians and reptiles to zoo's, private breeders, and pet stores throughout the U.S. and in several other countries. I wouldn't normally give details about a business or a breeder, but you asked, and Zooherp Inc. is the best place to buy herps in the state, if not the country. Since most of their business is done by phone and on occasion people have tried to steel animals, an appointment is required for walk-in customers. If you are looking for a specific animal it is best to call occasionally to see if any are in stock. It's best not to purchase animals on the spur of the moment, because often pretty or neat herps are not the easiest to take care of and die after a few months if you don't know the "trick" to keeping them alive. The advantages of buying an animal at Zooherp Inc. is they are guaranteed to be healthy and feeding, they are priced competitively, and there are usually more than one to choose from. You can reach Zooherp Inc. by calling (801) 566-6743.

HERPETOLOGICAL NOTES

GRAY-BANDED KINGSNAKE, *LAMPROPELTIS ALTERNA*, PREDATION

The incident took place at 10:26 pm on 2 June 1992, 9 mi. N. Study Butte, Hwy 118, Brewester Co. Texas. King "Buddy" Smith and a friend were cruising back and forth on a stretch of road that night, and saw a coyote on the side of the road several times. At one point, however, they saw the coyote circling and pawing at something in the middle of the road, and then reach down and pick it up with its mouth. It was at that point that King and his friend were startled to recognize the morsel as a gray-banded kingsnake! King jumped out of the car and screamed "drop that snake! Drop that snake!" Luckily for the snake (and the snake hunters) the coyote obliged and released the snake unharmed.

Printed as it was told to **Louis Porras**, Zooherp Inc., 235 West 9210 South, Sandy, UT 84070.

NEWT BREEDING FRENZY IN WASHINGTON STATE

In early March of this year a colleague and I were on our way to attend a scientific meeting in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. I convinced him to spent a day in the Seattle area first to hunt for salamanders, after which we would drive to Vancouver. It sounded like a great idea (to me at least), particularly since we saved a bundle on air fair flying to Seattle instead of Vancouver using Morris Air Service.

Prior to our trip I spent hours studying the best available book on Pacific Northwest herps (R.A. Nussbaum, E.D. Brodie, Jr., and R.M. Storm. 1983. Amphibians & Reptiles of the Pacific Northwest. University of Idaho Press, Moscow. pp. 332.) to give us an idea where to collect in Washington. I strongly recommend this approach to those of you who travel and want to collect specimens, instead of just hunting for them with no success. Get hold of regional and state books (don't just rely on the Eastern and Western field guides, which are too broad in scope). The unfortunate thing is many of the state books on herpetology are not very good to pinpoint localities. Often I rely on specific articles published in the scientific literature. As it turns out, locality records often correlate with accessible roads and highways (this makes sense since none of us like to walk when we can drive).

I decided to hunt east of Seattle and east of the Hood Canal area just north of lake Cushman. The road is en route to Olympic National Park. At a likely spot of thick wet forest of trees and ferns we parked the car and walked up a side road that had a stream running by it. About a mile or two up we found ponds and more streams. There we found a few western redback salamanders (*Plethodon vehiculum*) and one Ensatina (*Ensatina eschscholtzii*) under logs. In the ponds were about 12 egg masses, either of the Northwestern or long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma gracile* or *A. macrodactylum* respectively). In one pond there were larvae which were either *Ambystoma sp.* or *Dicamptodon copei* (Cope's giant salamander). Unfortunately we were unable to net these wary creatures so positive identification was impossible.

The most abundant species encountered was the rough skinned newt. (*Taricha granulosa*), and we saw about a hundred of them. My colleague pointed out a pile of newts in the water that were in a breeding frenzy. I took photos which didn't turn out too well due to light reflections. Then we netted them, broke up the pile and counted nine newts in all; eight male and one female. When we put the newts back in the water they re-aggregated and continued their courtship ritual. Later we found a trio of breeding newts, consisting of two males and one female. Have any of you seen or read accounts similar to this with other salamanders or other amphibians or reptiles?

Donald F. Smee, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322-5600.

Garter Snake Defense?

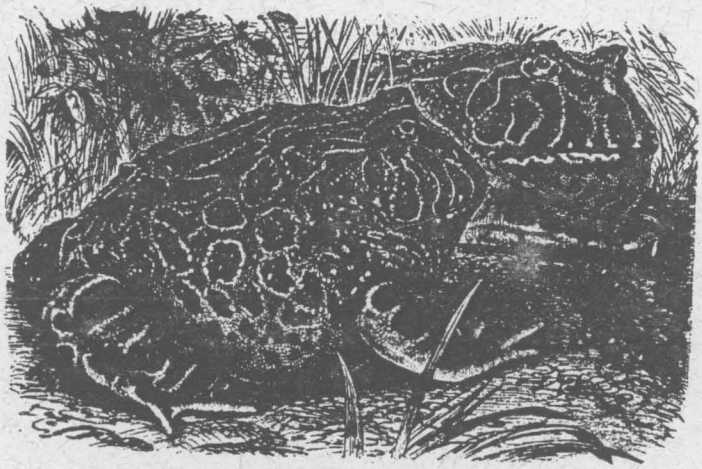
Typically when you pick up a garter snake (*Thamnophis sp.*) the snake empties the contents of its musk glands and often relieves itself on you. This is a defensive response we've all come to know and love in these snakes. But imagine Paul Jamison's surprise when on 12 July 1992, he found a valley garter snake (*T. sirtalis fitchi*) at dry Lake, Cache County, and instead of making him smell by "musking" him it gave birth in his hand! He's not sure if the snake was in the middle of giving birth or if the shock of being caught caused the typical muscular contractions, which normally empty the musk glands and cloaca, to force an egg out prematurely. The baby was fully developed and lived for about three hours. The female obviously has more eggs, but as of 14 July 1992 no more have been born.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

27 August - Meeting at the U of U biology building seminar room at 6:00 pm. The seminar room is on the north side of the second floor. I'm not sure who the speaker will be, but the talk will start at about 7:00. We will not be having a barbecue, because the meeting is at the U of U. Hope to see you there, but not your pets.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

If you have any herpetological information that you would like to share with UtAH members, please submit it for publication. We would like to publish a variety of things; from research to experiences with herps and artwork. It would be especially nice to hear from the many amateur herpetologists about their experiences. In addition, if you have questions or need information about any herpetological topic or species, let us know and we'll try to track down someone that has an answer.



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